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ABSTRACT

This book contends that choice is critical to the process by which parents, students, and teachers can build consensus that allows a community of learning to emerge. It argues that the key to meaningful school choice is a system of tuition vouchers involving nongovernment schools, together with deregulation, which will foster an education that is nonelitist, pluralistic, and empowering. Part 1 deals with general issues in education and the need for choice, particularly through vouchers. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the conditions of education today and the reasons that government schools no longer meet the needs of a changing society. Chapter 2 describes some of the paradoxes and ideological factors that surround the voucher debate. The third chapter examines how the limited choice among schools functions and explains why the absence of incentives to expand the supply of alternative schools undermines the success of this approach. An opportunity for choice that involves both government and nongovernment schools is described in chapter 4. Part 2 (chapters 5-7) focuses on the failure of efforts by government schools to improve the education of minorities and the poor. The third part (chapters 8-10) examines empirical evidence about the effects of nongovernment schools on the poor and the effects of voucher-like policies in higher education and in systems of primary and secondary education around the world. The fourth part (chapters 11-15) responds to criticism of vouchers and examines the larger social issues involved in permitting choice, including the equitable provision of information, problems of attracting investment to schools in poverty areas, the presumed dangers of failing to socialize all children in a common culture, elitism, and accountability. The final chapter reviews issues and examines some of the political motivations that will sustain ongoing conflict over vouchers in the ensuing decade. (Contains 257 references.) (LMI)